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Why Some Youth Bully

Children and teenagers who feel secure and supported by their family, school, and peers are less likely to bully. However, some youth do not have these types of support. Every individual is unique and there are many factors that can contribute to bullying behavior. A youth who bullies may experience one, several, or none of these contributing factors.

Peer factors

Some youth bully:

- to attain or maintain social power or to elevate their status in their peer group.
- to show their allegiance to and fit in with their peer group.
- to exclude others from their peer group, to show who is and is not part of the group.
- to control the behavior of their peers.

Family factors

Some youth who bully:

- come from families where there is bullying, aggression, or violence at home.
- may have parents and caregivers that do not provide emotional support or communication.
- may have parents or caregivers who respond in an authoritarian or reactive way.
- may come from families where the adults are overly lenient or where there is low parental involvement in their lives.

Emotional factors

Some youth who bully:

- may have been bullied in the past or currently.
- have feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, so they bully to make themselves feel more powerful.
- do not understand other's emotions.
- don't know how to control their emotions, so they take out their feelings on other people.
- may not have skills for handling social situations in healthy, positive ways.

School factors

Some youth who bully:

- may be in schools where conduct problems and bullying are not properly addressed.
- may experience being excluded, not accepted, or stigmatized at school.

Every youth involved in bullying – as a target, a bystander, or as one who does the bullying – can benefit from adult, school, and community support. Youth who bully may also need support to help them address their behavior. Parents, school counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals can work with youth who bully to help them develop healthy school and peer connections and to learn new social and emotional skills. If you have bullied your peers, reach out to a trusted adult for help. Bullying is a behavior that can be changed.

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